

# **Submission to Infrastructure Australia**

## **Response to Issues Paper 1: Australia's Future Infrastructure Requirements**



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## **1. About NCOSS**

The Council of Social Service of NSW (NCOSS) is an independent non-government organisation (NGO) and is the peak body for the non-government human services sector in NSW. NCOSS works with its members on behalf of disadvantaged people and communities towards achieving social justice in New South Wales. It was established in 1935 and is part of a national network of Councils of Social Service, which operate in each State and Territory and at the Commonwealth level.

NCOSS membership is composed of community organisations and interested individuals. Member organisations are diverse, and include unfunded self-help groups, children's services, youth services, emergency relief agencies, chronic illness and community care organisations, family support agencies, housing and homeless services, mental health, alcohol and other drug organisations, indigenous community organisations, church groups, peak organisations and a range of population-specific consumer advocacy agencies.

## **2. Introduction**

NCOSS warmly welcomes the establishment of Infrastructure Australia. We believe the council has a vital role in providing advice to governments, investors and owners of infrastructure on:

- Australia's current and future needs and priorities relating to nationally significant infrastructure,
- Policy, pricing and regulatory issues that may impact on the utilisation of infrastructure,
- Impediments to the efficient utilisation of national infrastructure networks,
- Options and reforms, including regulatory reforms, to make the utilisation of national infrastructure networks more efficient,
- The needs of users of infrastructure, and
- Mechanisms for financing investment in infrastructure.

We note that Infrastructure Australia's immediate tasks are to:

- Conduct an audit to determine the adequacy, capacity and condition of nationally significant water, transport, energy, and communications infrastructure,
- Produce an Infrastructure Priority List, and
- Produce best practice, nationally consistent guidelines for Public Private Partnerships.

NCOSS believes that the non government sector must be recognized as an important stakeholder group in this work and consulted by Infrastructure Australia as its work progresses.

## **3. Issues for discussion**

NCOSS has considered the issues raised in the council's Discussion Paper 1 *Australia's Future Infrastructure Requirements* and provides the following response to the questions raised in that document.

## **What are the features and goals of Australian infrastructure?**

### ***What is "infrastructure"?***

In the discussion paper Infrastructure Australia identified three main types of infrastructure:

- Physical infrastructure: includes utilities and facilities such as roads, ports, rail, powerlines, water pipes, power generation buildings, sewer plants, and other tangible structures,
- Digital infrastructure: includes data, satellites, and internet, and
- Collaborative infrastructure: Includes communities, networks, regions, business groups, learning networks, and competitive interactions between people, objects, and places.

NCOSS believes that this is an extremely narrow definition of infrastructure. We are particularly concerned about the omission of key forms of social infrastructure, including health and education infrastructure, and community facilities such as childcare centres, libraries, community and youth centres, and open space and recreational facilities.

We note that broader definitions of infrastructure are being considered for the proposed new Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program<sup>1</sup> and have been adopted for the new Housing Affordability Fund<sup>2</sup>.

### ***Why is it important?***

Sound infrastructure policy and planning is vital for the achievement of key economic, social and environmental objectives. For the non government sector lack of adequate investment in the provision of both physical and social infrastructure has contributed to the disadvantage and lack of opportunity experienced by particular groups and communities.

## **What are the problems?**

There are a range of problems with the current arrangements for the planning and funding of infrastructure, including the need to better define the roles and

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<sup>1</sup> See *A New Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program: Issues Paper*, House of Representatives Standing Committee on Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, July 2008 paragraph 1.14 p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> See *Housing Affordability Funds: The Guidelines*, Department of Families Housing Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, September 2008 section 2.5 p.8.

responsibilities of federal, state and local governments, and the private sector, and the imbalance between the infrastructure responsibilities of the states and local governments, compared to their revenue raising capacity.

For NCOSS the most serious problem is that infrastructure planning and funding is not adequately aligned with population growth plans for both urban<sup>3</sup> and non-urban<sup>4</sup> areas. There are also affordability issues associated with a user pays approach to infrastructure provision.

### **What are the impacts of these problems?**

There are a range of impacts that arise from these problems. To take one example the NSW Government's Metropolitan Strategy includes as its fairness aim increasing the percentage of the population who live within 30 minutes by public transport of a city or major centre<sup>5</sup>. Currently this aim is met for around 80% of the population of Sydney. Within individual sub-regions, however, the percentage ranges from 100% in the Inner West to 59% in the North West<sup>6</sup>. It is notable that the two sub-regions with the poorest outcome are those that have been the focus for recent and current broadacre housing developments.

This substantial variation in access means that residents of some parts of Sydney make much greater use of cars to access places of employment, education, recreation, shopping etc. This has negative affordability and environmental impacts.

### **How did these problems come about?**

A variety of systems failures have caused the current problems in meeting our national infrastructure requirements. These include insufficient resources being available for the upkeep and extension of public transport infrastructure; confusion over roles and responsibilities between levels of government and between government agencies within particular tiers of government; and lack of alignment between strategies to guide population growth and those for infrastructure provision, including because land use planning agencies generally do not drive infrastructure planning.

NCOSS notes that there are particular regions that experience infrastructure shortfalls across a range of portfolios and program areas. Bringing infrastructure provision in these regions up to generally accepted community standards requires both dedicated resources and new ways of working. While it is pleasing that the current Federal Government has foreshadowed that substantial additional resources will be made available, it is less clear that it has thought through the challenge of how to best make

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<sup>3</sup> Raymond Brunker: *Metropolitan Strategies in Australia*, Research Paper No. 9, City Futures Research Centre, University of NSW, July 2008.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, *Inquiry into Infrastructure Provision in Coastal Growth Areas*, NSW Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Public Works, November 2005.

<sup>5</sup> *City of Cities: a Plan for Sydney's Future*, NSW Government's Metropolitan Strategy, December 2005 p. 20.

<sup>6</sup> See *A new direction for NSW (NSW State Plan)*, Premier's Department, November 2006 p. 124.

things happen on a whole of governments basis in particular regions. For example it is easy to image that a particular region will have infrastructure needs that could be assisted via the proposed Building Australia Fund, the proposed Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program and the Housing Affordability Fund. What is less clear is how such a contribution can be negotiated in a co-coordinated and timely way, given that each program is being implemented according to separate criteria and separate funding processes.

**How might these problems be addressed?**

Fundamentally there needs to be greater recognition of the links between land use planning, transport planning and housing policy at both the Federal and State Government levels.

**Given the situation, what should be done first?**

NCOSS is concerned that much commentary around the Building Australia Fund implies that a substantial proportion of its additional investment will be focused on roads. We would like to see the Federal Government place a higher priority on the staged expansion of public transport infrastructure in both metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas. We note that there are a range of proposals to extend the Sydney rail network that deserve serious consideration by Infrastructure Australia.